

Students

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fiti at school and even scrawled across his house — to the point where a police escort took him to school.

The culprits were never found.

Woodburn, who has been "out" as a gay male since he was 14, felt betrayed by the very school he chose to attend because of its reputation as being a "safer place" for gays.

"It was scary for a while, but I didn't let it hurt me too much," he said.

So now that Woodburn has come to the University as a freshman, his first impression is that it also is a "relatively safe place." There's his gay-friendly residence hall, a perceived increase of gay men on campus and this week's National Coming Out activities sponsored by the ASUO Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender Alliance.

"I don't take that for granted," he said.

For gay students like Woodburn, the perceived campus environment can either draw them to or keep them from attending the University. But many gay students say they have experienced relatively little homophobic harassment, although they've heard others talk about instances of homophobic threats in the residence halls and homophobic comments in University classrooms.

The University has given University students, faculty and staff two surveys regarding the campus climate for gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered per-

sons during the '90s. The results portray the University as heading from "somewhat unaccepting" of gays in 1990 to becoming "somewhat accepting" in 1996.

Even further, 61 percent of respondents in both years thought anti-lesbian and anti-gay harassment on campus was prevalent enough to cause them to fear for their safety.

Twenty-two-year-old transfer student Mark Johnson's greatest fears lay in the unknown. His father insisted he move into the residence halls if Mark was going to get any financial support. But this meant that he'd be stuck with a bunch of people who would probably harass him, he thought. Besides, no matter where he lived, he never felt accepted, whether it was Moraga, Calif.; a small, rural town in Denmark; or Lake Oswego. So why would the University be any different?

"I had more anxiety about moving and living in Eugene than I was anxious and nervous about going to a University," he said.

That anxiety was heightened four weeks before school started when he found out he had received a double room in Adams Hall in the Walton Complex instead of the single hall he requested.

His panic subsided after meeting his roommate, a Japanese international student, and the rest of his hallmates, three of whom were also gay.

"This is a support system that I've never experienced," he said.

"I've never had gay friends before."

The fear of violence is not so prevalent among other students.

While her shaved head sometimes causes people to give her strange looks, 19-year-old sophomore Angie Barrick is like any student on campus. She's spiritual, majoring in religious studies, attending the First Congregation Church of Christ and aspiring to become a minister. She's also a self-described feminist, trying to complete a second major in women's studies. And she happens to be a lesbian.

"That's just a small part of who I am," she said.

But it's the part that gets the most attention, despite Barrick's self-described moderate, mainstream values. The Resident Assistant for Henderson Hall in Bean Complex said she has experienced little physical or verbal harassment because of her sexual orientation, despite her expectations of it upon arriving last year.

In contrast to when she attended Canby High School, where she felt that gay bashing was tolerated, if not accepted, Barrick saw Eugene and the University as a place where women seemed to be treated as equals, especially in employment and visible roles.

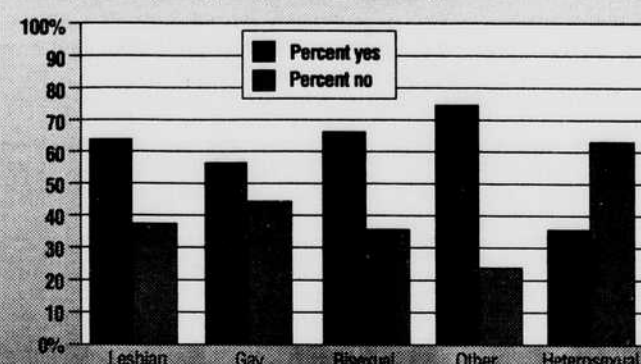
"They call it the land of the lesbians," she said.

As an R.A., she didn't immediately "come out" to her residents this year for fear of them using it against her, but gradually all of them learned of her sexual orien-

Perceptions of harassment as a problem

How survey participants responded to the following question:

Do you think harassment on campus is prevalent enough to cause GLBTs (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender) to fear for their safety?



SOURCE: 1996 Campus Climate Survey on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender concerns

Matt Garton/Emerald

tation.

"They were very receptive, and so I'm out to everyone in the hall," she said.

Twenty-year-old sophomore Morgen Smith has had a similar experience at the University. As a lesbian who came out when she was 14, she has experienced little verbal or physical harassment, hasn't personally heard homophobic rhetoric in classrooms and seems to think the sexual orientation question on campus is dead.

"I'm not sure the campus cares at all," she said.

Nineteen-year-old sophomore Chris Wolter feels the same indifference from other students. Still, the psychology major from Kaiser chose to live in a single room last year in Henderson Hall

so he wouldn't have to worry about possible roommate conflicts due to his sexual orientation.

In the academic pursuits hall, he made friends with both gay and straight men, something he had never really had in high school. This year, Wolter, Smith and Woodburn live on Carson Hall's fourth floor as part of a "Safe" Hall with gay and gay-allied residents.

Yet, in light of the recent hate crime involving the beating to death of openly gay University of Wyoming student Matthew Shepard, all said they feel a sense of loss and increased anxiety over their own safety.

"It kind of really busted my bubble and said this isn't Utopia," Johnson said. "It's not like we're done struggling."



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